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**COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND BUILDING
STAFF REPORT**

PLANNING COMMISSION

MEETING DATE September 24, 2015	CONTACT/PHONE Cody Scheel (805) 781-5157 cscheel@co.slo.ca.us	APPLICANT AT&T Communications & T-Mobile	FILE NO. DRC2014-00159
SUBJECT Hearing to consider a request by AT&T COMMUNICATIONS AND T-MOBILE for a Conditional Use Permit (DRC2014-00195) to allow for the construction and operation of an unmanned wireless communications facility consisting of six (6) panel antennas, three (3) RRUs and three (3) TMAs located inside a radio frequency transparent radome mounted to the top of a 50-foot high faux windmill, four (4) equipment cabinets within a 400 square-foot fenced enclosure, and approximately 170 feet of utility trenching. The project will result in the disturbance of approximately 600 square feet of a 10,000 square-foot fenced enclosed parcel. The proposed project is within the Residential Suburban land use category and is located on the west side of Soda Lake Road approximately 2.75 miles south of Carrisa Highway (Highway 58) in the California Valley village reserve area. The project site is in the Shandon-Carrizo sub area of the North County planning area.			
RECOMMENDED ACTION Approve Conditional Use Permit DRC2014-00159 based on the findings listed in Exhibit A and the conditions listed in Exhibit B.			
ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION A Class 3 Categorical Exemption (pursuant to CEQA Guidelines 15303) was issued on July 29, 2015 (ED15-048)			
LAND USE CATEGORY Residential Suburban	COMBINING DESIGNATION None applicable	ASSESSOR PARCEL NUMBER 072-201-010	SUPERVISOR DISTRICT(S) 5
PLANNING AREA STANDARDS: None Applicable			
LAND USE ORDINANCE STANDARDS: Communications Facilities <i>Does the project conform to the Land Use Ordinance Standards: Yes - see discussion</i>			
EXISTING USES: AT&T switch building and equipment shelter			
SURROUNDING LAND USE CATEGORIES AND USES: <i>North: Agriculture / undeveloped</i> <i>South: Agriculture / undeveloped</i> <i>East: Agriculture / undeveloped</i> <i>West: Agriculture / undeveloped</i>			
OTHER AGENCY / ADVISORY GROUP INVOLVEMENT: The project was referred to: Public Works, Environmental Health, Agricultural Commissioner, Building Division, and Cal Fire			
TOPOGRAPHY: Nearly level		VEGETATION: Grasses	
PROPOSED SERVICES: Water supply: N/A Sewage Disposal: N/A Fire Protection: Cal Fire		ACCEPTANCE DATE: July 29, 2015	
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED BY CONTACTING THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & BUILDING AT: COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER γ SAN LUIS OBISPO γ CALIFORNIA 93408 γ (805) 781-5600 γ FAX: (805) 781-1242			

PROJECT HISTORY:

A similar faux windmill wireless communications facility was approved by the Planning Commission under Conditional Use Permit DRC2012-00002 on January 10, 2013. The approval remained in effect for two years from the effective date (January 25, 2013). A time extension was not submitted by the applicant, and the permit expired on January 25, 2015. The proposed project is essentially the same as the previously approved one. The only difference with the proposed faux windmill facility is that the radome that houses the panel antennas is 5 feet taller and 1 foot wider than the previously approved structure. This is due to the larger panel antennas that the wireless carriers are currently installing at new facilities.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

Project Site

The proposed project would be located along Soda Lake Road, approximately 2.75 miles south of Carrisa Highway (Highway 58) in the California Valley village reserve. The subject property is located in a distinctly rural area and is surrounded by sparsely developed Agriculture designated parcels. The landscape is characterized by grass-covered plains to rolling hills with pasture lands. The built environment is agrarian in nature with barns, water tanks and similar structures visible along Soda Lake Road. The project site is a pre-disturbed 10,000 square-foot parcel that is enclosed by an existing 6-foot tall chain link fence and is developed with an existing 400 square-foot AT&T switch building. The proposed T-Mobile facility would be located on the south corner of the property situated 55 feet south of the existing AT&T switch building.

Proposed Project

The applicant is proposing construction and operation of an unmanned wireless communications facility, consisting of the following improvements:

- Installation of six (6) panel antennas, three (3) RRUs, and three (3) TMAs within a 10-foot tall, 6-foot diameter, radio frequency transparent radome mounted to the top of a 50-foot high (measured to top of radome) faux windmill structure. As conditioned, the structure would appear as a common windmill design with 10-foot diameter blades and realistic appearing color and texture treatments for both the windmill and the support structure.
- Installation of four (4) prefabricated equipment cabinets within a 20' x 20' equipment area. The equipment area would be enclosed by a 7-foot tall wooden fence and located within the existing 10,000 square-foot chain link fenced enclosed parcel.
- Associated utility trenching for underground telecommunications service utility lines and power utility lines (approximately 150 feet) from existing connection points to the proposed equipment area. As conditioned, all utility racks would be completely screened from public view.
- The site would be accessed from Soda Lake Road, an existing paved road.

LAND USE ORDINANCE STANDARDS:

Section 22.30.180 – Communications Facilities

This Section of the Land Use Ordinance (Title 22) contains specific land use permit and application content requirements as well as siting and design standards for proposed wireless communications facilities. As described below, the proposed project meets these requirements:

Radio Frequency Analysis

Section 22.30.180(B) requires applications for communications facilities to provide estimates of non-ionizing radiation generated and/or received by the facility. These shall include estimates of the maximum electric and magnetic field strengths at the edge of the facility site and the extent that measurable fields extend in all directions from the facility.

Staff Response: The project complies with this requirement because the applicant supplied a report to evaluate the proposed communications facility for compliance with appropriate guidelines limiting human exposure to radio frequency (RF) electromagnetic fields. According to the RF report for this project (Hammett & Edison, Inc.; June 22, 2015), the public exposure RF emissions limit from the proposed facility would be equivalent to 2.4 percent of the applicable public exposure limit. The report concludes that the facility would operate within the FCC standards for RF emissions.

Permit Requirements

Section 22.30.180(C)(1) requires Minor Use Permit approval for proposed wireless communications facilities that are either a) installed on existing structures, or b) co-located at existing communications facility sites. Conditional use permit approval is required for all other communications facilities.

Staff Response: This standard allows new communications facilities to be reviewed through a minor use permit (rather than a conditional use permit) when the proposed facility is located on an existing structure (rather than a new antenna support structure). Based on this standard, the proposed project would require conditional use permit approval since it would require the construction of a new antenna support structure: a 50-foot tall faux windmill.

Co-Location

According to Section 22.30.180(C)(2)(b), when co-location is not proposed, applications for communications facilities must provide information pertaining to the feasibility of joint-use antenna facilities, and discuss the reasons why such joint-use is not a viable option or alternative to a new site.

Staff Response: The purpose of this requirement is to minimize visual impacts by concentrating telecommunications equipment in the fewest possible number of locations, rather than scattering facilities across the county. It is usually in a carrier's interest to comply with this requirement since "collocation" sites are strategically located to provide superior coverage, already have the necessary infrastructure in place (access, power, and telco), and are approved through the more expedient and less expensive minor use permit (rather than conditional use permit) process.

The applicant considered a design to incorporate antennas on an existing structure to eliminate the need for a new support structure; however there were not any buildings or structures in the project vicinity of adequate height to accommodate the coverage objectives. The proposed project is located in an area that lacks existing communications facilities. The nearest existing facility is a Verizon Wireless facility located off Bitterwater Road north of Carrisa Highway (Highway 58) approximately 9.25 miles to the northwest of the proposed project site. The proposed T-Mobile coverage objective is to provide adequate cellular coverage for a majority of the California Valley village area located south of Carrisa Highway (Highway 58). The existing Verizon Wireless facility is located too far northwest for the proposed project coverage objective, and was deemed not a viable option.

Development Standards

According to Section 22.30.180(C)(3), the preferred placement for new wireless communication facilities is on existing structures, completely hidden from public view or painted and blended to match existing structures. In addition, all facilities shall be screened with vegetation or landscaping. Where screening with vegetation is not feasible, the facilities shall be disguised to resemble rural, pastoral architecture (e.g. windmills, barns, trees) or other features determined to blend with the surrounding area and be finished in a texture and color deemed unobtrusive to the neighborhood in which it is located.

Staff Response: According to the applicant, there are no existing structures or buildings in the vicinity of the project that could meet the height requirements for T-Mobile's coverage objectives without substantially modifying the architecture or increasing the height of the structure.

The proposed project complies with the visual screening requirements of the LUO because the proposed facility would be disguised to resemble a windmill, which is a characteristic feature of the surrounding rural/agrarian landscape. In addition, the structure would appear as a common windmill design with 10-foot diameter blades and realistic appearing color and texture treatments for both the windmill and the support structure. This would help assimilate the windmill into the existing visual setting and reduce its noticeability as a communications facility.

Unused Facilities

Section 22.30.180(4) requires all obsolete or unused facilities to be removed within 12 months of cessation of communication operations at the site.

Staff Response: The project is consistent with this standard because the applicant is required to enter into a performance agreement and financial instrument for site restoration.

AGENCY REVIEW:

Public Works – No concerns.

Environmental Health – Applicant shall submit a hazardous materials business plan for the proposed cell site.

Agriculture Commissioner – Impacts to agriculture resources or operations will be less than significant, and the proposed project should be compatible with adjacent uses.

LEGAL LOT STATUS:

The one lot was legally created per deed 1297 OR 498 whereby land conveyed to a public utility.

Staff report prepared by Cody Scheel and reviewed by Airlin Singewald.